

IMMORAL OBSCENITY: CENSORSHIP OF FOLKLORE MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS IN LATE STALINIST ESTONIA

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ABSTRACT

The history of folkloristics contains many cases of obscene materials that were excluded from field notes, books and archives. The Estonian Folklore Archives (founded in 1927) did incorporate dirty jokes, riddles and songs in its collection. Soviet occupation changed the topics of folklore scholarship and archival practices. Between the years 1945 and 1952, the Folklore Archives' manuscript collections, catalogues and photographs were censored. Anti-Soviet texts were cut out or made unreadable. In the first years after the incorporation of the Republic of Estonia into the Soviet Union, anti-Soviet mainly meant politically sensitive materials such as jokes about Stalin, very patriotic texts or the names of some people. During the beginning of the 1950s, stricter rules were applied and obscene texts were also censored. In this article, I will focus on the censorship of obscene words and motifs and the political dimension of moralistic censorship in a totalitarian state.

KEYWORDS: folklore collections • censorship • Estonia • Soviet Union • obscenity

INTRODUCTION

Bawdy songs, jokes about Jews, tips for avoiding conscription, legends of haunting soldiers, blue stories, names of politicians – what could be the common denominator behind them? These different pieces belong to the folklore collections of the Estonian Folklore Archives and were deemed inappropriate for the archival collections of the Soviet state. They were therefore censored from the Archives between 1945 and 1952. The causes for censorship varied, but two large clusters of censored motifs appear: political and moral, the latter consisting of obscene words and motifs. Political and moral reasons have been the main causes of censorship practices throughout history as well. In this article, I will give an overview of the censorship of Estonian folklore collections through late Stalinist period with the focus on obscene materials. Controlling the morality of people has a political dimension. Tendencies appearing in the archive politics of a totalitarian state help to understand the function of memory and history. Processes in

the folklore archives give interesting comparisons with other memory institutions such as history archives, libraries and museums.

In the article, the concept of censorship is used to denote the process of destroying archival materials or restricting access to them in order to change the memories and self-representation of a society. Concepts of structural and institutionalised censorship (Bourdieu 1994) have also been useful. However, censorship during the Soviet period was operated through different practices and a network of institutions that I will sketch in the following. It should be noted that censorship is not only the characteristic of totalitarian societies, the history of censorship is parallel to book history (Aarma 1995: 8). However, (self)censorship has been described as one of the main characteristics of the Soviet period in Estonia (Annuk 2003: 20–22). Therefore, in the article, I will discuss both how censorship is connected to folklore and the wider Soviet mechanisms of controlling information.

In the institutional sense, the Main Administration for Safeguarding State Secrets in the Press (known as Glavlit) had the task of controlling all printed content. However, the holdings of the archives were governed by the People's Commissariat of Education. The goal of censorship was to restrict the publication and dissemination of materials that agitated against the Soviet regime, depicted state secrets, contained false information that would cause anxiety in society, give rise to national or religious fanaticism or were pornographic (Veskimägi 1996: 21). These categories are broad and give a lot of room for interpretations by the people and institutions working with suspicious materials.

In this article, I use the term *censorship* in a broad sense: it means banning or restricting forms of expression. I stress the broadness of the concept for two reasons. Firstly, although the article focuses on a particular example of archived folklore texts, the censorship of archives was largely part of forming a new, Soviet folklore. The banning of folklore texts took place simultaneously with changes in the principles of folklore collecting: a new, ideologically correct contemporary folklore was sought. Therefore, the censorship of folklore texts in the archives was part of a larger censorship process that aimed to change written as well of oral discourses – a process with the goal of substituting institutionalised control with an inner and unconscious control (compare with Bourdieuan terms) and through that changing society. The second reason for stressing the broadness of the concept is that censorship of literature, performing arts, film and radio is usually discussed separately from the process of classifying information in the archives. The censorship of folklore archives is interesting because it has common features with both processes: the content of the texts needed to be analysed like the literary works, whereas the materials were taken to Central State Archives or to special department at the Literary Museum. The institution of folklore archives distinguishes from the collections of documents held in other archives, because the content of folklore archives is essentially non-institutional.

SOURCES

I used two types of source to research censorship. The first group of sources consists of documents directing or depicting censorship. The directives given by various institutions, working schedules and reports of the people working at the Folklore Archives,

transcripts of meetings and correspondences can be found in the holdings of the Estonian Folklore Archives, the Estonian Literary Museum, various collections of the Estonian State Archives and in the archives of the Estonian Academy of Sciences.

The second group of source materials are the censored materials themselves. There were different methods for censoring texts. In the 1940s, the cut-outs were given to the Central State Archives and were given back to State Literary Museum in 1968. Then they were held in a special deposit. Cut-outs from the 1950s were kept in-house and were held in a special deposit in the Literary Museum. Today, this material is part of the manuscript collections of the Estonian Folklore Archives. Cut-out manuscript pages are held in seven folios, three of them containing pages cut out in the 1940s, the rest contain the pages cut out in the 1950s. Cutting out the pages was only one of the methods of censorship. Therefore, the folklore manuscripts themselves are another important source for study, as the texts that are illegible due to censorship are found in the manuscripts. The first couple of pages of a manuscript are useful sources as well, because the people checking the manuscripts needed to note their name, the date of checking and the numbers of pages that were cut out. On the basis of these materials, I compiled an index file of cut out pages that gives an overview of the reference, content, genre, possible reason for censorship, the person checking the manuscript, date of checking, and, where possible, the date of handing over the material to another institution. However, I did not check the amount of illegible texts in all the manuscripts because this work is very time-consuming and as the manuscripts are old, browsing them would cause damage, therefore, the illegible texts were checked only provisionally.

The list of reasons of censorship was created on the basis of the categories found in the content of the cut out material. Two larger categories emerged: political and moral. Political reasons include names of particular people and institutions, overly patriotic Estonian-related materials, negative depiction of communists, communism, Russians, Jews or other Soviet nations. The moral reasons include censoring all the texts that mention or depict genitalia, excrements and sex. Sometimes, categories mingled. These categories might not be the exact reflection of the reasons of censorship that existed in the minds of the people who checked the manuscripts. However, the categories of reactionary or anti-Soviet material that were mentioned in the directives, are far too broad for analytic purposes.

FOLKLORISTICS IN ESTONIA

Estonia had been governed by different states from the beginning of the 13th century. In the 19th century, the territory of Estonia was part of the Russian Empire, while its rural and urban elite was dominantly German-speaking. In the mid-19th century, Estonian national movements emerged, and interest in Estonian folklore was a part of the national movement. Scholarly societies dominated by Baltic German intellectuals like the Literary Union of Estonia and of the Estonian Learned Society had formed their own collections in the first half of the 19th century. Bigger folklore collections were created in the second half of the century by volunteer collaborators. Jakob Hurt had started collecting folklore in the 1860s; in 1888 he published an appeal titled "A couple of requests for Estonia's most active sons and daughters" in popular newspapers (*Olevik, Postimees*,

Virulane, Eesti Postimees) and asked people to collect various genres of folklore. Hurt's initiative became a mass campaign for collecting folklore in a written form with the help of voluntary correspondents. There were around 1400 correspondents and Hurt used newspapers to communicate with them. The process was also important because it involved so many Estonians in a nation-wide cultural project (cf. Jaago 2005). Matthias Johann Eisen became a major collector at the same time and his campaign to document folklore was also organised via newspapers (see Kuutma 2005).

Estonia gained its independence in 1918. In the young state, a broad network of cultural institutions was created. The Estonian Folklore Archives was founded in 1927. It was an autonomous subdivision of the Estonian National Museum and the central folklore archive in Estonia, situated in Tartu. The older collections mentioned in the previous paragraph were gathered together in the newly formed institution. The archive staff organised the older collections, created a system of card catalogues and register books. The collections grew, because archive staff conducted fieldwork and collected folklore using the questionnaire method. A wide network of correspondents was created and several competitions of folklore collecting for volunteer correspondents were organised. In the Estonian Folklore Archives, folklore materials were bound in volumes of 300–600 pages. The materials were grouped in collections according to the institution or person who organised the collecting of the material. The first head of the archive was Oskar Loorits. He emphasised the importance of organising the material properly to make it easily accessible to scholars. One of the goals of folklore collecting during the first years of the archives was to fill in the gaps left by earlier collections, considering genres, topics and geographical distribution (Västriik 2005: 206–208).

MEMORY INSTITUTIONS OF SOVIET ESTONIA: CONTROL AND CENSORSHIP

The political order changed rapidly during World War II. The Republic of Estonia was occupied and annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940. A year later, German occupation began. In 1944 the Soviet Union reoccupied Estonia and until 1991 the country was one of the republics of the Soviet Union: the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic. The Stalinist period was marked by mass deportations, collectivisation and anti-Soviet guerrilla movements. Incorporating Estonia into the Soviet Union affected the cultural politics as well. History, literature and art needed to be re-evaluated and according to the new state ideology the collections of memory institutions should contain only items appropriate for the Soviet people.

Soviet cultural changes also reached the field of folkloristics. Although compulsory references to the Marxist classics appeared, the study questions did not differ a lot when compared to the pre-World War II period (Valk 2010: 567). Notwithstanding this, some of the topics could no longer be studied, for instance, folk religion was left out of the research questions, although it was not a banned topic in other Soviet states (Leete et al. 2008: 30). Nevertheless, from the 1930s onwards a concept of Soviet folklore was introduced: contemporary folklore that is in the accordance with Soviet ideology. Folklorists were then expected to instruct people in creating that kind of folklore (Oinas 1973: 48–52). In the late Stalinist period, Estonian folklorists were obliged to collect

Soviet folklore as a priority in fieldwork trips and it was requested from correspondents. The network of correspondents was not reformed until the mid 1950s, from when the archive staff no longer had to collect Soviet folklore (Oras 2008: 65). Soviet folklore was expected to reflect topics like collectivisation, the Great Patriotic War, the life of factory workers. When there was no folklore like this, Soviet 'folklore' was sometimes created in collaboration with a folklorist and an informant in an atmosphere of mutual understanding, as illustrated in the Latvian case (Pakalns 1999: 46–47).

Another characteristic of the period was the appearance of strict censorship that was carried out by different institutions. The key institution was the Main Administration for Safeguarding State Secrets in the Press (Glavlit), which had the task of controlling all the published content. The inappropriate materials consisted of materials depicting Soviet history, immoralities, critics of the current state of affairs and old editions of Marxist classics. The goal of censorship was to restrict publication and dissemination of materials that agitated against Soviet regime, depict state secrets, give false information that caused anxiety in society, would cause national or religious fanaticism or were pornographic (Veskimägi 1996: 21). The broadness of the categories meant that it was very easy to find reasons to ban very different forms of expressions.

As mentioned before, the memory institutions went through several changes at the beginning of and during the Soviet occupation. Libraries, archives and museums had to examine their collections and get rid of material that was anti-Soviet. It should be noted that the censoring practices described below using the example of the folklore manuscript collections were part of a larger control of the written word deposited in memory institutions. Although the focus of this article is on the control over writing, museum collections were also controlled during the Soviet occupation (Kukk 2009: 691).

Archives of the newly formed Soviet state had to function according to the general rules applied to other Soviet countries. In the 1940s, the main goal was to find dangerous data and to create special departments for classified documents. Whole record groups were taken to special deposits, for example, most of the documents created during the German occupation 1941–1944 were classified (Pirsko 2005: 91). Similar changes took place in the libraries, where departments of special storage were created. These were special departments for banned books. Readers did not get the information about the existence or the contents of these departments. As the lists of banned books were long, the result was restriction of most of the literature in Estonian language (Annuk 2003: 21). Changes of this kind were made in Latvian (Dreimane 2004: 59–60) and Lithuanian (Sinkevičius 1995: 86–87) libraries as well. Although banning literature had already begun during the first year of the Soviet occupation, the control over the libraries was much stricter starting from the autumn of 1944 (Veskimägi 1996: 154–155) when memory institutions were forced to re-evaluate their collections.

In historical archives, some documents were easily classified by the time they were created. Censoring libraries was not that complicated either, because there were lists of banned books. In 1987, special departments of historical archives were opened and classifications were removed from the documents in the archives (Pirsko 2005: 93). The system of special storage departments for banned books also ended in the 1980s (Dreimane 2004: 60).

In addition to the control of the collections, the structure of memory institutions was changed. Regarding to the institutions analysed in this article, a new institution, the

State Literary Museum,¹ was founded on the basis of four subdivisions of the former Estonian National Museum. The Estonian Folklore Archives and the Estonian Cultural History Archives received the status of department in the new museum, and the Estonian Folklore Archives were renamed the Department of Folklore. As the institutions followed Soviet practice and every Soviet republic had a similar set of institutions, the Institute of Language and Literature was formed in 1946 as a division of the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR. The institute also had a subdivision for folklore: the Sector of Folklore, which had its own collections as well. The scope of this article is the censorship of folklore manuscript collections in general, but as the censorship had most effect on the collections of the former (and current) Estonian Folklore Archives, the examples and discussion are based mainly on censorship practices in the texts and censorship practices of the Department of Folklore of the State Literary Museum. Control over the collections of the Institute of Language and Literature is also briefly mentioned.²

CONTROLLING FOLKLORE COLLECTIONS

A difficult period for folklore collections began with World War II. The collections of the Literary Museum were evacuated from Tartu to rural areas in 1943 and 1944. Assuring the physical preservation of the collection was the priority. Holdings of libraries and archives were transported back to Tartu over a period of almost a year. The final set of folklore collections was re-evacuated by March 1945 (Viidalepp 1969: 173–184). Checking the contents of the collections in a situation like that would have been too complicated. However, directives for control of the collections followed soon after. The first one, giving orders to find and separate all the manuscripts that “are not necessary for the Literary Museum or contain reactionary or anti-Soviet material”³ arrived on May 12, 1945 and was signed by Elene Pavlova, head of the Museum Sector of the People’s Commissariat of Education. More precise instructions⁴ followed on 18 May from Jüri Nuut, the People’s Commissar of Education. He gave orders for the check of all of the departments of the Literary Museum. The folklore collections were censored according to his orders, which basically repeated Elene Pavlova’s note. This first wave of censorship lasted from 1945 to 1946; most of the manuscripts were checked during that period. As stated before, a similar wave of censorship also affected other memory institutions. Checking the folklore collections was more difficult than going through the contents of libraries and archives. Every single piece of folklore needed to be read, its content analysed (ideally in the context of its creation), and aspects of the time of the collection and people connected to it needed to be taken into account. As the collections were very large,⁵ checking the contents was even more difficult.

However, there was a second wave of censorship, starting from 1950. There were several reasons for that campaign: the 8th Plenum or the March Plenum in 1950 influenced cultural politics in Estonia, as the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union accused the leaders of the Communist Party of Estonia of favouring bourgeoisie nationalists. Not only the leaders of the party but also about 400 researchers, authors, artists and musicians were repressed and accused of nationalism and formalism. The process strengthened the canon of social realism in Estonia. The March Plenum was not one of the kind, similar events had taken place in other regions of the Soviet Union as well (Karjahärm, Luts 2005: 112–115).

Another reason to be suspicious about the content of folklore materials was that Alice Haberman, the head of the Literary Museum, had unintentionally published one of the Estonian Legion's⁶ songs as an example of the Soviet army song.⁷ The reliability of all the collections in the Literary Museum was questioned. No detailed written instructions for censorship are to be found; however, all of the newer collections (series RKM) were checked as well as the ERA collections from the period of the Republic of Estonia. Many of the censored texts were army songs, but the main focus of censorship was on obscene texts and motifs.

Although the focus of this article is on the manuscript collections, the photographs, finding aids and the library of the former Folklore Archives were checked and censored. Not all the manuscript collections were checked: the collection of Jakob Hurt remained uncensored throughout both waves of censorship. This bulky collection was the cornerstone of the Estonian Folklore Archives, being one of the oldest. The time distance could have been one of the reasons that this collection remained uncensored, because it could not contain politically suspicious texts. However, some obscenities are mentioned here and there in Hurt's collection, although they were not erased. There were only two exceptions to the rule that Hurt's collection was not censored: Estonian left-wing politician Hans Pöögelmann⁸ and a short story entitled "Why do Russians grumble?" (*Miks venelased jõrisevad?*)⁹ were erased.

Jakob Hurt and Matthias Johann Eisen were two of the important initiators of folklore collecting campaigns. Compared to Hurt, Eisen's position in Estonian folkloristics was ambivalent. His principles for collecting and publishing were quite different from Hurt's and the principles of organising the collections in the Estonian Folklore Archives was based on the model of Hurt's collection. Eisen's collections were constantly set against the collections of Jakob Hurt and the contribution of Eisen did not get the attention it deserved (Kuutma 2005: 96). This is reflected in censorship practices: Eisen's collections were censored while Hurt's were not. However, Eisen's collections contained more contemporary topics, among others, a collection of jokes about well-known people. These collections were censored during the first wave of censorship but only the newer parts of it were checked.¹⁰

Other manuscript collections were also checked. Texts collected in the period of the Republic of Estonia and during World War II were the most heavily censored. Texts collected during the period of German occupation (1941–1944) were largely political and depicted Soviet authorities and Russians in a negative way. That is why censorship in 1945 and 1946 was focused on these periods. Obscene texts are not that clustered in one time period or manuscript series. Only some general hints could help in finding them among the hundreds of thousands of manuscript pages, as some questionnaires are more likely than the others to get people to send obscene texts or genres like jokes and songs tend to be a lot bawdier than legends or proverbs. However, in general, to find everything obscene meant attentive reading of all the manuscripts. The censorship practices of obscene texts show, therefore, how thoroughly the collections needed to be checked and the struggles of the employees with this job shows the how demanding the task was.

It should be noted that the people checking the content of the folklore manuscripts were staff members who had worked in the same institution before the war. The whole staff was engaged in looking through the manuscript collections. The number of people working at the archives varied a little during the period, but it was generally 5–7 people.

The materials they checked and censored were often collected by their colleagues and sometimes by themselves. The overall atmosphere of repression assured that the work was done properly. For example, folklorist Herbert Tampere was arrested and detained for a year in 1945 because he was accused in holding counter-revolutionary materials (Kalkun 2005: 282). Some other folklorists like Rudolf Põldmäe and August Annist were also arrested (Leete et al. 2008: 28). Oskar Loorits, the head of the Estonian Folklore Archives, fled to Sweden in 1944 and his works were banned and censored. His name was one of the reasons for censoring folklore texts and his photos were removed from the photo collection of the archives. Therefore, people working at the Department of Folklore had faced a serious struggle; they needed to destroy materials that were valuable. Fear of being repressed or bringing difficulties to one's family was great enough, but the members of staff did not leave their jobs because of the task of checking the manuscripts.

The staff members were trusted to check the contents of the collections at libraries as well: the staff members had the lists of improper books and they needed to remove them from the collections (Veskimägi 1996: 130–134). Of course, for stricter censorship to apply, the work should have had carried out by Glavlit officials, but it was too tedious and would have needed an army of checkers. The censoring by librarians and archivists was provisionally controlled and therefore it was conducted thoroughly enough.

It is important to note that the folklorists checking the manuscripts were not official censors and should not be accused of the damage done to the manuscripts, they simply carried out the tasks given to them in fearful times. The head of the Department of Folklore and the director of the Literary Museum needed to describe the progress of checking the manuscripts in their reports. For the content of the archives, it was good that folklorists who knew the materials carried out the censorship. However, in 1945, some of the manuscripts were censored by the people working in the Tartu Branch of the State Central Archives,¹¹ who cut out many more pages per manuscript than the folklorists did.¹²

There were different methods for censoring the folklore texts. They were either redacted with ink, paper was glued over them or the pages were cut out (see Photo 1 and 2). On one of the first pages of the manuscript, the person checking it made a note of her or his name, the date and the numbers of pages that were cut out.

In 1953, a special commission formed by the Estonian Academy of Sciences checked the contents of the collections in the Literary Museum. The commission found some problematic texts from the collections of the Department of Folklore: the Estonian War of Independence was mentioned and some extremely obscene texts had remained in the folklore manuscripts (Ahven 2007: 132). Nevertheless, no bigger wave of censorship of the folklore collections followed.

The sheets cut out from the manuscripts during the 1950s were in the department of special storage of the Literary Museum and were returned to the Department of Folklore in 1977–1978, at the latest. These papers were not returned to their original places in the manuscripts, they were kept separately from other collections. In 2002, more papers like this were found when the deposit rooms were reorganised. These were the cut-outs from 1945–1946 that had been kept in the special department of the Tartu Branch of the State Central Archives. These papers were returned to the Literary Museum in 1968 and were kept in the department of special storage there. When they were returned to the department of folklore, they had ended up with old materials of little importance.

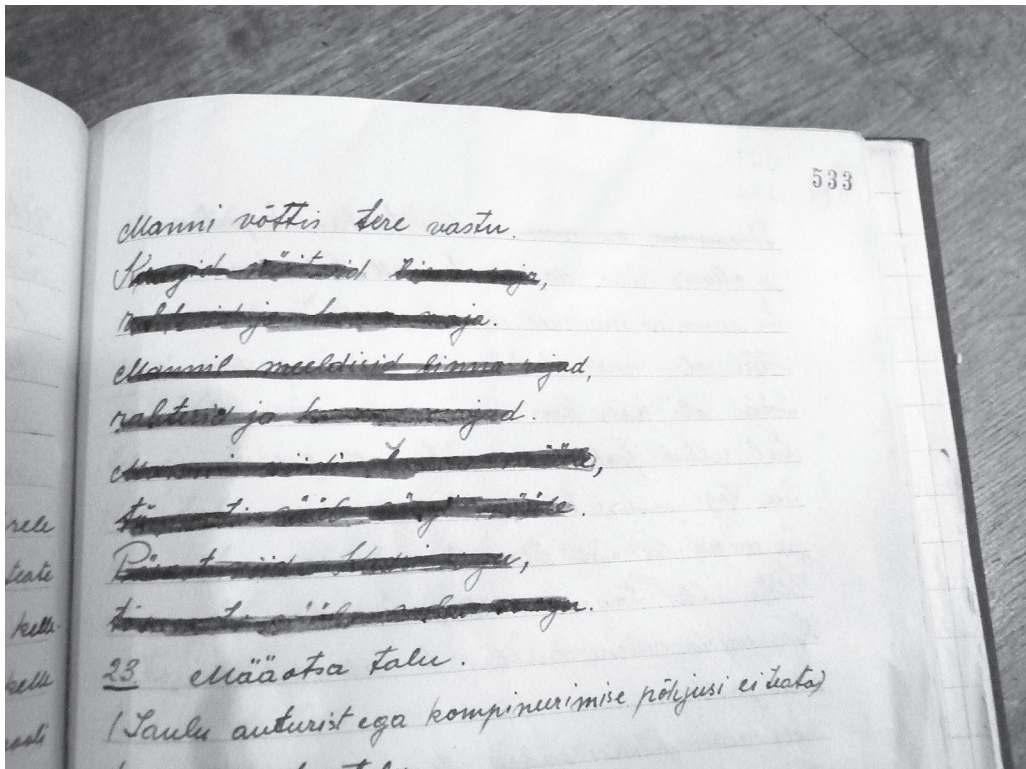


Photo 1. ERA II 304, 533 (22): erased words and expressions.

As mentioned before, there was another institution with their own folklore collections, the Sector of Folklore of the Institute of Language and Literature. The institute was founded in 1947. Their collections were small, but censorship affected them as well. Attention to the collections of the institute started with the controlling of another branch. In October 1948, there was a conference on the topic of museums at which several manuscripts of dialect examples were put on exhibition. Someone noticed an anti-Soviet sentence, after which all the collections of dialect examples (about 20,000 pages) were checked. Some pages were cut out and sent to the department of special storage of the Literary Museum (Ahven 2007: 50). What is more, the collections of the Folklore Sector were also checked and several pages were cut out. The censorship practices were much stricter than in the Folklore Archives. Everything that was even slightly obscene was considered inappropriate. Even very typical and quite mild jokes and anecdotes were cut out, for example *The Old Maid on the Roof* (ATU 1479*),¹³ which describes a spinster who freezes to death in the hope of performing a task and getting married. As these folklore texts were collected during the Soviet occupation, there was not much that could be considered anti-Soviet in the strict sense. The censored texts are mostly mildly obscene or mention some of the Bible characters.

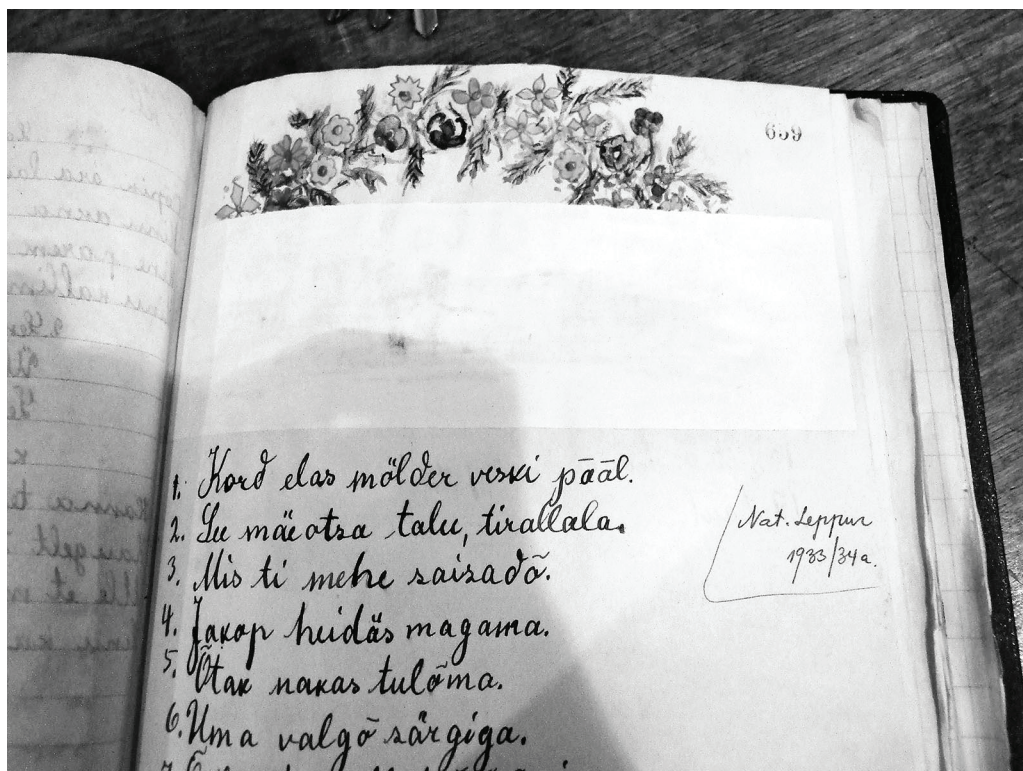


Photo 2. ERA II 80, 659: paper glued on manuscript page.

CENSORING OBSCENITIES

In the Estonian Folklore Archives of the pre-Soviet period, obscenities were collected among other folklore materials. Of course, all the layers of possible self-censorship could not be traced, but there are obscene words and motifs in the folklore items collected by the folklorists working in the archives and sent by correspondents. Sometimes, the names of the people connected to these obscene pieces were not mentioned, only very general remarks were written (for example, "Found on a sheet of paper between a book returned to the town library").¹⁴ Folklorists working at the Archives collected poems written on the walls of public toilets, and bawdy songs and blue jokes were also recorded. Although obscenities did not receive much scholarly attention during the period, they were recognised as folklore items.

In the late Stalinist Soviet Union, political and moral spheres were tightly intertwined, therefore the censorship of obscene materials had a political dimension. However, the distinction between the political and moral causes of censorship of folklore materials is not simply an analytical category. Over 1,000 folklore items were cut from manuscripts because of their obscenity in the 1950s. The amount is striking when compared with the more political causes of censorship such as the names of anti-Soviet people (the reason for the censorship of 46 text items), overly nationalistic texts (49 items), negative depiction of Soviet nations or overly positive depiction of Germans (about 100

items). Jokes, songs and short poems for rhyme albums were the main genres censored during the 1950s. Obscene motifs, mainly those depicting sexual or scatological scenes, were the most widely censored.

However, defining obscene and applying the criteria was a demanding task. There were some recurrent motifs, for example, the album of verse motifs involving use of pubic hair from a vagina to make toothbrushes.¹⁵ Words denoting prostitutes were also censored. Censoring obscene pieces was not an easy job. To start with, meanings of words had changed when compared to the period of collection, as the folklore collections reflect the development of the Estonian language. Words and expressions – for excrement, for instance –, a plain everyday language for informants half a century earlier, were obscene for reader of the 1950s. Therefore, words referring to excrement were censored rather unsystematically, often being erased while remaining in place in other manuscripts on several occasions. However, there is even an example of a word denoting urinating being first covered with dark ink and then the story with the word being cut from the manuscript, despite this being the only obscene and/or inappropriate motif.¹⁶ Some texts like that were not cut out, but the content was deemed questionable. Then the fact that certain pages were “raunchy” (Est. *rõve*) was written on the first page of the manuscript.

In addition, censoring everything allegorically sexual needed full attention to all motifs. The dialogues that compare female genitalia with an apartment¹⁷ contain no directly obscene vocabulary. The same goes for many other jokes – the sexual innuendo is hidden in the scripts. Censoring texts like this needed the reader to be fully focused on her¹⁸ task in order not to miss any allegories.

That is why checking the folklore manuscripts took an unexpectedly long time and several discussions were held on the complex nature of the task. The issue was raised in several meetings and by the end of 1951 the board of the Literary Museum agreed that censoring the original manuscripts should not go on any more. Only the typewritten copies were systematically checked thereafter.¹⁹ Making generalisations about censorship practices is often difficult. For example, in the manuscript volume ERA II 178 the saying “Moves back and forth like the foreskin of a man from Laitse”²⁰ has been deleted both of the times it was written, but the other obscene motifs surrounding it were left untouched. The manuscript was checked on September 18, 1945 by Selma Lätt, but it is likely that she did not censor this saying, because obscenities were censored mainly during the second wave of censorship in the 1950s. Who thought this particular saying was offensive and when it was censored is almost impossible to find out.

LATE STALINIST ARCHIVES REFLECTING AND CONTROLLING SEXUALITY

According to Eric Ketelaar (2007), archives are models of panopticon and a reflection of a wider surveillance society. Archived information supports jurisprudence, and together, these mechanisms discipline people (Foucault 1991: 208). Discipline creates productive and predictable citizens, whose characteristics are described by statistics that can take only the bodily part into account. Such information is useful in order to control access to goods and services (Ketelaar 2007: 145). As Jaques Derrida has famously noted, “there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory” (Derrida 1996: 4).

Power and control go as far into private life as sexuality. Pornography was banned in the Soviet Union under Article 228 of the criminal code. Censoring obscene motifs from folklore archives could be seen as part of this general ban. The two most common purposes of censorship in general are firstly to ban ideas that could threaten the political status quo and secondly to control the morals of the people. In democracies, both kinds of ban are not that strict, although they do exist. Controlling morality is still an important issue. Most states apply some kind of rating system for movies and computer games to find their suitability for young audiences. New information technologies emerge with new kinds of censorship, Internet censorship being the largest and most controversial. Censoring folklore and Internet censorship are similar in many ways. Governments or private organisations may try to ban access to certain websites, but as the Internet is based on distributed technology, it is very difficult to control. Internet users are often anonymous, the information flows uncontrollably and often virally. These are the characteristics of folklore as well. And in democracies, access restrictions to archives still exist. The reasons for them vary, with personal privacy, and state and public security being the most usual. However, in the late Stalinist Soviet Union, the system of censorship was continuously strict. All kinds of information that might be useful to an enemy could not be released. Similar precautions are characteristic of wartime. During wartime and in the Stalinist period, being able to use the archives was an exception, not the rule.

The absence of official, institutionalised censorship does not mean a lack of censorship in the society altogether. Pierre Bourdieu notes that there always is internalised censorship, the kind of self-censorship that could be noticed in the politically correct use of language. Inner structural censorship is determined by the field in which the expressions are to be uttered. Instead – and by the controlling institutions – structural censorship determines the authority that a person has. Authority determines expressions. In a state of perfect censorship, people think and utter only the things that are allowed (Bourdieu 1994: 138). Institutions in the state apparatus that have the goal of control of expression, work on the purpose of changing society in a way that erases the need for institution. Total censorship does not only affect discourse, but also bodily practices. In totalitarian states such as the late Stalinist Soviet Union, structural censorship had the goal of effecting the sexuality of the people. The Stalinist Soviet Union tried to control all aspects of public and private life; controlling sexual behaviour is part of the pattern, although in reality, discourse and practice could have differed a lot. Erasing the discourses of lustful sexuality would help to create a world where sex happens for reproduction, not for recreation or other purposes without clear advantage for society. A similar line of thought was behind censorship in the Middle Ages. There is also the aspect of the ideological vantage of the Soviet Union compared to the other states. By erasing all written evidence of immoral behaviour, the state could be shown as morally superior, which was a benefit in the Cold War.

Controlling archives did not mean controlling folklore – in its orality and virality, folklore can hardly be controlled. But it controlled the representations of folklore in different contexts, the possible new interpretations of folklore. When only a certain kind of folklore is collected and published, it affects the overall notion of what folklore is. Although the state never had this overarching power of controlling all of the possible discourses (for alternative discourses cf. Yurchak 2006), this dream always existed and

created the background for censorship. It was also the background for socialist realism, the official art form of the Soviet Union during the late Stalinist period. Social realism as a method and aesthetic canon eliminated alternative experiences. It combined the classicist, the monumental, the traditional. Art needed to be optimistic; its goal was to affect people. The canon of socialist realism also meant the denial of previous art forms – art needed to be re-evaluated. In Estonia, art and artists of the period of independence were suspected (Karjahärm, Luts 2005: 88). The March Plenum and subsequent repressions strengthened the canon of socialist realism in all fields of art (ibid.: 114–115). The second wave of censorship was a part of this project of creating a purified notion of creation.

Desire is resistant both to the court and to the economy. Sexuality determines the identity of a modern human being. A body that perceives and desires freely is in discord with a totalitarian state because desire is a revolutionary act (Larson 1999: 426–428). In a state, especially a totalitarian state, the people justify their existence and their part in society by being productive. Productivity manifests itself in work and reproduction. Free sexuality does not fit this model. The other important aspect is panopticism: exact and calculable information about people helps to create plans and have full control over these people. People with unexpected desires make it more complicated to foretell the ways opinions in society work – and therefore, it is much more difficult to control these people.

The situation was somewhat different in newly formed Soviet Russia. According to Anna Rotkirch, the October Revolution brought sexual reform among many other reforms. 1920s were the period of sexual liberty: sex-related topics were part of public discourse. In the Stalinist period, however, sexual topics were tabooed and ideology favoured only the married monogamous heterosexual couple (Rotkirch 2004: 95). In the 1920s, the ideology behind sexual liberties arose from the critique of bourgeois values. The idea of monogamy was considered to be capitalist as it had the connotation of owning one's partner. This reform was reflected in the law: abortion was legalised in 1920, homosexuality was not a criminal offense according to the Russian Criminal Code of 1922. Services like public kindergartens were not created with the purpose of emancipating women, they were supposed to make living in big collectives possible and weaken the strength of the traditional family form (Clark 2008: 187).

Soviet discourse of the 1920s did not hide the discussions of sexuality. These discussions strengthened the idea that sexuality and power are intertwined (Naiman 1997: 22). Although sexuality and power relations were expressed in the public discourse, the general idea was that communist society should not be overly sexual; the proletarian state – as opposed to the capitalist state – does not oversexualise the world. According to the relevant Soviet theories, human sexuality was the result of social relations, not biological factors, which is why it could be changed by social conditions (ibid.: 127–128).

Starting from the 1930s, that is, the beginning of Stalinism, the family regained its importance. This kind of change was still the result of the interest of society as a whole. The state needed workers and therefore big families. That is why contraceptives were not that available any more and in the years 1936–1955 abortion was banned. Divorce was more difficult than before as well. The state functioned well for comrades who worked and raised children, helping to build up the new society. Prostitutes and homosexuals were seen as social anomalies, whose sexual desires were not controlled and threatened the unity of the state (Clark 2008: 189). These tendencies work in different totalitarian states. Chinese scholars, for instance, have described the way the sexuality

of an individual in a modernised world was a pretty common topic of fiction, poetry and drama in the 1920s. With the leadership of Mao Zedong it changed: descriptions of sexual activities were considered bourgeois. The purpose of sex was supposed to be only procreation, desire and pleasure had no place in communist China. During the period of the Cultural Revolution, all references to sex were erased and marriage was considered to be one of the aspects of revolution. Only starting from the 1990s were sexual topics discussed – and widely discussed in novels, movies and other media (Larson 1999: 430–431).

Describing the repressed topics in literary form might create overt interest in these practices along with the wish to try them. This has been the motivation for censorship in different societies: text is obscene when it encourages sexual actions (on the example of Victorian England see Wee 2010: 182). The stories in folklore archives about lustful sex, jokes about homosexuality and songs about prostitutes described the discourses and practices repressed and banned by the state. Therefore they would not have been readable for all the people visiting the folklore archives. The state is threatened not only by strictly political issues; everyday practices such as sexuality might be a problem as well. Keeping texts like this in archives for everyone to read would open the door to unproductive and unpredictable ways of using one's body. This works the other way around as well: uncontrolled ways of using one's perception and gaining experiences would lead to an understanding that the written and oral discourses in society are not as free as the possibilities of perception.

CONCLUSION

Folklore collections always reflect the values in a society that has created them. The way these collections are maintained reflects all of the following time periods and ideologies. Between 1945 and 1952, the folklore collections of Estonia were checked and their contents censored. This was a part of a more general trend of controlling memory institutions typical to a totalitarian state. Not only were folklore archives censored but special departments were also created within different archives and libraries. The folklore collections, however, form an interesting example because of their nature as being between archives and literature. Folklore collections of former and current Estonian Folklore Archives were checked in two waves: firstly in 1945–1946 and secondly in 1950–1952. The first wave focused on political censorship: the names of nationalist figures, political jokes and other materials of that kind were cut out or erased. The next wave was about moral censorship and meant removing all kinds of obscenities starting from the mentioning of faeces in the rubric of folk medicine and taking in allegorical sexual motifs in jokes. Censoring obscenities was more complicated than political censorship and the work with the manuscripts was left unfinished. Expurgating or bowdlerising the bawdiness has been characteristic of folklore collections and publications from the beginning of folklore collecting. The distinctive need for moral censorship in a Soviet state could be explained by the overall notion of hiding purposeless sexuality and substituting it with a world where sex happens only for procreation and sexuality is easily predictable.

NOTES

1 The name of the institution changed through the Soviet period: from 1946 it was part of the system of the Academy of Sciences, in 1956 it was named after Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald, the compiler of the Estonian national epic. In the following paragraphs, the general name of Literary Museum denotes the same institution regardless of the exact official name.

2 The third institution dedicated to the study of folklore, the Chair of Estonian and Comparative Folklore at the University of Tartu was reorganised during the Stalinist period into a sub-program and linked to the Chair of Estonian Literature, who had their own folklore collection.

3 EKM arhiiv, n 1, s 12, l 3.

4 EKM arhiiv, n 1, s 8, l 4.

5 To name the largest collections in the year 1945: Jakob Hurt's collection consisted of 114,696 manuscript pages, Matthias Johann Eisen's collection 90,100 pages, ERA collection 265,098 pages, Samuel Sommer's collection 124,648 pages (Korb et al. 1995: 7–8).

6 Military unit within the Waffen-SS.

7 EKM arhiiv, n 1, s 102, l 13/9.

8 H III 20, 350.

9 H I 2, 440 (8).

10 According to the notes in the manuscripts, the volumes were censored from the 52nd volume onwards, the first 50.000 pages remained unchecked.

11 For example, ERA II 10 – ERA II 16. According to the notes at the beginning of the manuscripts, 25 volumes were checked by outsiders, all of these from the ERA collection, that is, from the first period of the Republic of Estonia and German occupation.

12 The average number of folklore items cut from the manuscripts was 2.59 items per manuscript. When counting only the manuscripts checked by the folklorists, the number reduces to 0.6. The strictest staff member of the Central State Archives decided that 118 folklore items in one manuscript should be cut out.

13 KKI 1, 103 (65).

14 ERA II 74, 475 < Tartu I. – M. Pukits (1934).

15 See, for example: ERA II 59, 223 (26), ERA II 17, 513, ERA II 10, 592 (4).

16 ERA II 59, 195/6 (8).

17 ERA II 11, 647/51 (7).

18 All the people censoring the manuscripts in the 1950s, were female.

19 EFAM, item "Work plans, schedules, reports 1951–1953".

20 ERA II 178, 52 (11a); ERA II 178, 215 (59).

SOURCES

ERA – Estonian Folklore Archives.

H – folklore collection of Jakob Hurt.

ERA – folklore collection of the Estonian Folklore Archives.

KKI – folklore collection of the Institute of Language and Literature.

RKM – folklore collection of the State Literary Museum.

EKM arhiiv – the archive of the Estonian Literary Museum as an institution.

EFAM – materials of the history of Estonian folkloristics in the Estonian Folklore Archives.

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